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The **AIR NATIONAL GUARD**

# Skibird



Magazine of the 109th Airlift Wing, Stratton Air National Guard Base, Scotia, N.Y.





# Even one suicide is too many

By Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force James Roy

An alarming trend is happening in our Air Force, and we need your help. We've had a drastic increase this year in the number of suicides among our total force Airmen – active duty, guard, reserve and civilians. Last year we lost 84 Airmen by suicides; this year, we've nearly reached that number, and it is only October. Even one suicide is too many!

We all take Suicide Awareness training, but that's just the first step – we must take immediate action and get involved. We need to look out for each other and understand that we're not alone. Be ready and willing to assist your Wingman and ask for help when you need it. We must all take the time to care about those around us. That's what good Wingmen do, and that's what our Air Force needs.

Supervisors at every level must act now. Get to know your Airmen better and understand their personal and professional challenges. This is not a time to sit idle and think this won't happen in your unit. No one is immune. Suicides range the spectrum of ages, locations, MAJCOMs and career fields. The two most common factors

we've seen are problems with relationships and finances.

We need to be good Wingmen for others and also need to develop and maintain trusted relationships and friendships where we can talk openly and honestly about things happening in our own lives. We need to feel comfortable exchanging ideas, views and experiences with those who are closest to us. There is always someone available for you.

So many people care about you – more than you may think; family, friends, co-workers, supervisors, first sergeants, commanders, chaplains, medical professionals and senior leaders are ready and willing to listen and help. Just give them a chance. Don't ever think you are alone or that no one will understand. We will understand, and we will help you. It doesn't matter whether you write, call or e-mail, please reach out. We are an Air Force family and you mean a lot to all of us. If you feel you are at the end of your road, you are not – talk with someone. We care about you and will ensure you receive the help you need.

You should never be afraid of seeking help for fear of reprisal. Our lives should



U.S. Air Force photo

be the priority. The Air Force also has many resources to help. Military and family life consultants, chaplains and medical professionals are all available. Also, Military One Source counselors are always available by calling 800-342-9647 or visiting [www.militaryonesource.com](http://www.militaryonesource.com).

With everyone's help, we can and must step up and reverse this devastating trend.

## Commentary

# It wasn't supposed to be like this

By Lt. Col. Jonathan Tamblyn  
54th Air Refueling Squadron commander

ALTUS AIR FORCE BASE, Okla. (AFNS) -- After parking the Air Force staff car beside the yard, the chaplain, the nurse and I got out of the car and took a moment to look over each other's service dress. We had been steeling ourselves for this moment most of the afternoon.

As a death notification team, it was our job to inform a newly bereaved father about the tragic

death of his Air Force son.

In a very rare Air Force Personnel Center decision, the signed letter I would read to the father stated the suspected cause of death was suicide.

Many of you can't read the pangs of a tragic loss you have already experienced in your life due to someone else's decision to prematurely end his or her own life. Although the pain

of suicide is staggering, the risk of suicide may be more pervasive than previously thought.

In a 2008 study by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, it was found that "nearly 8.3 million adults (age 18 and older) in the U.S. had serious thoughts of suicide in the past year."

The study also showed that 2.3 million adult Americans made a suicide plan within the past year and that 1.1 million adults actually attempted suicide within

the past year."

Hidden within these staggering statistics, you find too many servicemembers who have also been suicidal.

Lately, military suicides have been on the rise.

The Houston Chronicle did an analysis and found suicides of "Texans younger than 35 who served in the military jumped from 47 in 2006 to 66 in 2009 -- an increase of 40 percent."

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## 109<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing



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### The Skibird

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## The Skibird

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#### On the cover:

Airmen, family and friends came out to the base Oct. 23 to celebrate Fall Fest. Members of the Volunteer Wing Family Readiness and Support Group put the event together, which included a Haunted Herc, Haunted Hayride, a Chili Cookoff and Pie Baking Contest. Photos by Al Roland; Photo illustration by Master Sgt. Willie Gizara. **Full coverage on Page 19**



# Heart of a Soldier *Airmen encounter true hero*

By Master Sgt. Jim Welch  
139th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron

As a member of the 139th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron, I have traveled around the world supporting both war and humanitarian missions. I've supported Operation Desert Scorpion/Southern Watch, Ground Zero WTC, Hurricane Katrina, Hurricane Ike, Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom along with many other operations. I started my career in the U.S. Army Reserve as a combat medic in July 1990 and then switched over to the New York Air National Guard in 1995 as an aeromedical evacuation technician. After watching the Gulf War (Desert Storm) end so quickly, I didn't think I'd ever serve my country in war. That changed on Sept. 11, 2001. It was after the attacks on the World Trade Center, Pentagon and Shanksville, Penn., that I would be involved in something greater than I could ever imagine.

In 2009, I and four other members of the 139th AES were on our way to support the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. We went together as a team and flew together as a team treating injuries as simple as a broken finger



Master Sgt. Jim Welch and Senior Airman Alicia Albert together at Camp Bastion on July 11, 2009.

to injuries that were life threatening. On July 11, 2009, we got the alert to move a critically injured Army Ranger. His story has forever changed the way I look at life.

That morning, Maj. Phil Smith, then - Senior Airman Alicia Albert and myself were alerted along with a Critical Care Air Transportable Team (CCAT) to fly a mission to Afghanistan to move a critically injured Soldier who was hurt the day before. He was in critical condition and needed to be moved to a place where he could get more definitive care for his injuries. We loaded up on a C-17 Globemaster III and made our way to Afghanistan. We landed at Camp Bastion to pick him and other injured Soldiers up and move them to Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan. After we landed and helped empty the aircraft of its cargo, we prepared the aircraft to bring on our patients. When the patients came out to the aircraft, we loaded our ambulatory first and then our litter patients. The last one to come on was our most critical one -- his name was Cpl. Benjamin Kopp.

He was a 21-year-old Army Ranger from Minnesota on his first tour in Afghanistan and had recently finished up his second tour in Iraq. On July 10, 2009, his Ranger squad was called to the aid of U.S. Marines pinned down by the Taliban. After arriving on the scene Corporal Kopp's instincts kicked in, and he rushed to the aid of his fellow servicemembers. He helped lead them to safety, and that is when he was shot in the leg. Corporal Kopp suffered a critical wound to his femoral artery that instantly started to pump his life's blood from his body. The quick action of a tourniquet applied by Corporal Kopp himself and then another by the platoon's medic stopped the

bleeding enough so he could be airlifted by helicopter to an aid station. His struggle for life didn't end there. During his surgery he went into cardiac arrest, and when the hospital attempted to defibrillate him the battery in the machine was dead. The doctors opened his chest to massage his heart until he was defibrillated and brought him back to life.

When he came on the plane he was like many other critically injured Soldiers we had picked up on previous

missions -- wires and tubes coming from everywhere, a ventilator assisting him to breathe, and other life-saving equipment that you would see in our local emergency rooms. Though we only had a short one-hour flight to Bagram AB, I learned of his bravery and heroism by wounded teammates on board with him. I was impressed with how they were more concerned for his well-being than they were for theirs. It is a brotherhood you can only imagine until you are there living it.

We landed at Bagram AB where he received more treatment for his wounds. Then a flight would bring him to Germany and then on to the states. Like many of my other patients, I figured that was the last I would hear of Corporal Benjamin Kopp -- but it wasn't. Two weeks later on a flight returning me back to my home base in Qatar, I learned Corporal Kopp succumbed to his wounds and died on July 18, 2009. I read the news of his passing in the Stars and Stripes which is the military's magazine for deployed members. While reading this, my heart sank and my mind automatically started to ask what we could have done better to save him. All I could tell myself was that we did our best and when he left us, it was out of our hands. Corporal Kopp not only made the front page of the Stars and



More than 700 people gathered at Rosemount High School in Minnesota on July 31, 2009, to honor the memory and heroism of Army Cpl. Benjamin Kopp.

Stripes but also headline news around the world. It wasn't just because of his death but because he donated many of his organs so other people could live. It was our job to keep him alive so that he could make it back to the states -- not only to let his family say goodbye but also to help him say his final farewell by donating his organs. During our missions it is always on our minds to keep patients alive, but I had never thought that it was also to keep them alive long enough to let their families say goodbye and for Corporal Kopp to let him have his last wish to donate his organs.

I never forgot Corporal Kopp, and when I have speaking engagements around the area I speak of him and his heroism both in life and death. This past year I volunteered to do a speech on Memorial Day in Sharon Springs, N.Y., and he was my person that I wanted to remember this year. It was a great honor to speak about him but at the same time very hard to keep my composure. Shortly after speaking at this event I received a phone call from Airman Albert and she told me how she had been wondering how Corporal Kopp ultimately died from his injuries. She Googled his name and a Web site came up honoring him. She told me how she logged



(Top) Master Sgt. Jim Welch and Staff Sgt. Alicia Albert feel the beating heart of Cpl. Ben Kopp. Judy Meikle received the Soldier's heart and is now healthy and happy. (Left) Cpl. Benjamin Kopp

in to see what it was about and that she left a message on it mourning his loss. She then proceeded to tell me that Corporal Kopp's mother, Jill Stephenson, e-mailed her back to find out how she knew him and to thank her

for her condolences. Airman Albert e-mailed her back and told her how we were part of the medical team that moved him the day after receiving his injury.

See HEART, Page 7

## Suicide, from page 2

As sobering as the statistics can be, there are some things we can do to help reduce the risk of losing an Airman, coworker, friend or family member to suicide.

The first thing I recommend is to maintain connections with each other and remain involved in one another's lives. Depression, substance abuse and emotional pain are indicators that can be observed when people know and observe one another. These can be signs of potential trouble, and getting an individual to talk about his or her situation often provides the release needed to turn around feelings about life.

Don't be afraid to refer people in trouble to trained professionals. There may be no other profession which provides its members with so much help for dealing with life's problems than the U.S. military. Don't be afraid to refer anyone to the chaplain, Airman and family readiness center or mental health when you suspect there may be a need.

I also suggest continued efforts to educate and coach Airmen in life-disciplines that can prevent some key, unnecessary stressors. Disciplines like responsible financial management, educated parenting techniques and maintaining healthy relationships can actually prevent a person from making it to the breaking point in life when things seem

to be spinning out of control.

Finally, never be afraid to ask people showing signs of trouble whether or not they want to harm themselves. I know that making the decision to ask this question can be difficult, and asking it can feel awkward, but research has shown asking doesn't plant the idea in an individual's mind. It actually communicates concern and a connection that might stop the suicide from happening.

Perhaps asking that tough question could have prevented my very difficult talk with this bereaved father.

As we approached the father, he was mowing his grass. I almost had to stand in front of the riding mower before he noticed us. I'm sure the parent of an Airman, Soldier, Sailor or Marine dreads the day he or she makes eye contact with a solemn commander and chaplain in dress uniform in an unscheduled meeting at his or her home.

Today, this father elected to stay outside and lean against the mower while I informed him about his son's untimely death. Composed and shocked, the father asked us questions and told us he was aware of his son's troubled state of mind. He went on to tell us he always understood news of his son's death was possible, because of dangers associated with military service, "but it wasn't supposed to be like this."

It never is. It never should be.



# 109th takes off for Operation Deep Freeze

An LC-130 Hercules takes off for Antarctica on Oct. 15. The plane and its seven-member crew were the first of six ski-equipped C-130s that will spend the 16-week Antarctic summer transporting people and equipment around the southern continent in support of the National Science Foundation.



Photo by Master Sgt. Willie Gizara



Photo by Senior Airman Gustavo Gonzalez

A 109th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron crew chief from Stratton Air National Guard Base, N.Y., performs a pre-flight inspection on an LC-130 Hercules at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, Oct. 18. The LC-130 is headed to Antarctica for Operation Deep Freeze. The skis allow the aircraft to operate in snow.

Heart, from page 5 From there they kept in contact, and Ms.

Stephenson gave Airman Albert her phone number to call her so she could talk to her about our mission. Ms. Stephenson also wanted to meet some of the people who helped get him back to the states. Airman Albert approached me during the June UTA and asked if I would be interested in going with her out to Minnesota to meet Jill Stephenson and celebrate Corporal Kopp's life on July 18 -- the one-year anniversary of his death. Ms. Stephenson asked her if we could come out to celebrate his life and thank us for being a part of his journey to get him home. I spoke with my wife about the possible trip and she told me without hesitation to go and do this because if I didn't, I would always regret it. The next day Airman Albert and I made our reservations for Minnesota.

I e-mailed Ms. Stephenson and told her how excited I was about coming out to Minnesota but at the same time nervous about the whole journey because I had never done anything like this. Here is part of the response that I received back from her in an e-mail that I will keep forever:

"Jim - you being a part of the crew that helped get Ben back to the states means so much that words cannot really describe. You may have been one leg of the entire trip, but all were equally important. Peoples' lives were saved because he came home. Family and friends got to TELL him goodbye while he was still breathing. Most important to me was that I got to tell him I loved him and hold his hand for four days because he made it all the way back to Walter Reed. That is a priceless gift that will never be topped as long as I live. That my son touched other people so greatly only makes me more proud and grateful for his life. The bonus for me is that kind people like you take the time to remember and tell me!!!"

On July 16 Airman Albert and I boarded a flight and started our journey to Minnesota. We talked about what we would say to Ms. Stephenson and how we were both nervous in meeting her. We discussed what kind of questions we would ask and if she could answer them for us. When we finally landed and collected our luggage we walked outside and Ms. Stephenson welcomed us with open arms. She arrived with Corporal Kopp's truck to get us and then gave us a tour of Minneapolis. She told us if we had any questions about her son and how he lived his life she would answer them. Ms. Stephenson told us how he was inspired to join the Army and become a Ranger because of his great-grandfather who was a decorated WWII veteran. She also told us how 9/11 sealed the deal and how it was at that point that he joined and served his country.

On Saturday we met the lady who received Corporal Kopp's heart. Her name is Judy Meikle, she is 57 and full of life. She was on her death bed and when Ms. Stephenson posted that her son wasn't going to live,

her cousin told her she had a friend who was going to die unless she were to receive a heart transplant. She wanted to see if Corporal Kopp's would be a match. The doctor said because of his heart being shocked and the trauma he suffered, it might not be a useable organ. After some tests, the doctor came back and said his heart looked great and it was a perfect match. Eight days after receiving the transplant, Ms. Meikle left the hospital and walked one mile because she told us that her heart said to do it. One year later she is



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rejection free and off of her Steroids and now only has to take her anti-rejection meds for life.

She met us and thanked us and then asked us if we would like to feel Corporal Kopp's heart beat. We both agreed and then she placed our hands on her heart -- you could feel the young Ranger's heart beating strong and proud in her. The last time we felt his heart beat was on July 11, 2009, and now one year later even though Corporal Kopp is not with us, his heart is still beating strong. There were a total of 74 people who received parts of his body, and as of today there was only one who has passed away, and it was from something other than the kidneys he received from Corporal Kopp. When Ms. Stephenson went to his funeral, the gentleman's wife had a separate tribute for Corporal Kopp because part of him had also died.

Corporal Kopp was a true hero, and not because of his Bronze Star with Valor Devices, but because he loved his country, his freedoms and was willing to die for them so we the American people can live free. Even in his passing he is still alive and living in many people. He loved life so much he was willing to give his organs so many others could keep living.



Photo by Master Sgt. Willie Gizara

## Mission Support change of command

Col. Timothy LaBarge, 109th Airlift Wing commander, hands command of the 109th Mission Support Group to Col. Mary Burrus during a ceremony here Sept. 11. Before taking command of the Group, Colonel Burrus served as the Division Chief Manpower and Organization & Resources at the National Guard Bureau.



# Chief Muncy: Air Guard enlisted force contributes to overseas, domestic missions

By Army Sgt. 1st Class Jon Soucy  
National Guard Bureau

WASHINGTON -- The training and experience level of the Air National Guard's enlisted force has expanded over the past decade, and as a result it has made considerable contributions to both the overseas and domestic missions, the Air Guard's top enlisted leader said Nov. 18.

"In the E-1 to E-4 category, first-term Airmen, their main priority is to maintain the highest level of personal readiness to meet mission requirements," Command Chief Master Sgt. Christopher Muncy told attendees at the 2010 Air National Guard Senior Leadership Conference. "Your E-5s and E-6s epitomize that, and if you're a senior NCO, you're the poster child for it. You lead by example."

Much of that training and experience, especially for junior Airmen, has come from changes made to the formal military education system, said Chief Muncy. It starts with Basic Military Training at Lackland Air Force Base, which is an eight-week course that is now much more tactically and operationally focused.

"If you've got an (operational readiness inspection) or an (operational readiness exercise) coming up right now and you need perimeter security or someone in your tactical operations center, you grab the youngest Airmen that just got back from Basic Military Training," said Chief Muncy. "They know it. They've drilled it. They've run it, and they've got it."

In addition to learning tactical operation techniques, basic training is where Airmen are introduced to the "Wingman" concept, which is designed to foster support and build resiliency among Airmen.

Chief Muncy cautioned leaders not to let those skills fade once Airmen come back from training.

"They are fit to fight," he said. "Don't let them lose that when they come home."

Part of sustaining that sense of purpose can be accomplished simply by understanding and following the "Enlisted



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Jon Soucy

Command Chief Master Sgt. Christopher Muncy, the command chief master sergeant for the Air National Guard, holds up a copy of the Air Force's Enlisted Force Structure handbook, while addressing attendees at the Air National Guard's Senior Leadership Conference in Washington, D.C., on Nov. 18. Chief Muncy stressed the importance of using the handbook--often called simply the Little Brown Book--to develop junior Airmen into NCOs and leaders.

Force Structure Handbook," known affectionately as the "Little Brown Book."

"(It's) the foundation to your enlisted force," said Chief Muncy. "It is foundational not just to those of you with stripes, but to the officers appointed over (you). Know this book. It's pretty thin, pretty easy to read. It will fit in an ABU pocket. It will fit in a flight suit pocket and it will fit in a blues pocket. Highlight it. Color in it. Learn your Airmen and work with them (using this book)."

Chief Muncy said follow-on training and education is equally as important for Airmen.

"We have got to prepare the right team and give them the right tools to keep doing the mission," he said. "We've discussed the requirements that the United States Air Force has had forever of at least an associate's degree for E-8s and E-9s. We've pushed it off a long time and it's time to talk about it."

The key to ensuring that Airmen are prepared for the fitness test comes

down to sound leadership, especially at the non-commissioned officer level.

"Leadership will drive and help this fitness machine work," said Chief Muncy. "Not a change to the (fitness) program, but leadership and talking with your Airmen."

Chief Muncy said the promotion system, as well as requirements for enlisted performance evaluations, is currently being reviewed to better streamline the requirements, process and the system.

As that system is reviewed, leaders should continue to focus on mentoring junior Airmen and building resiliency among them, especially non-aircrew personnel.

Chief Muncy said the vast majority of deployers are not air crew, but engineering and combat support Airmen.

"They are also the primary Airmen that your adjutants general call on during emergencies," he said. "These are absolutely amazing individuals."

# Counterdrug ensures kids 'Stay on Track'

By Tech. Sgt. Catharine Schmidt  
Public Affairs

The New York National Guard Counterdrug Task Force cooperates with DOD, Federal, State and local agencies to fight the drug war in the United States. They do this in many ways, but some programs these Airmen and Soldiers lead starts with our nation's youth.

The Drug Demand Reduction Support Programs offers many programs to youth. According to the Task Force's Web site, the program's vision is to "provide leadership and the unique resources of the National Guard to create the best opportunity for America's youth to make the commitment to being drug-free."

Its main program is Stay on Track. The program is a three-year substance abuse prevention education program for middle school students. After completing the program, students should be better able to:

- Understand the negative effects of drug use
- Be prepared to set short and long term goals
- Understand the techniques of effective communication
- Respond to the outside forces attempting to influence their decisions
- Be prepared to make the commitment to stay drug free

According to the Stay on Track fact sheet, its curriculum is designed to reduce future substance abuse by middle school students, with emphasis placed on tobacco, alcohol, marijuana, inhalant, club drug and prescription medications. The curriculum includes four

units, which are Health Education, Decision Making, Improving

Communication Skills and Interpersonal Relations, and Media Influences. Each unit has three lessons. Along with classroom instruction and homework, activities include role playing, brainstorming, interactive games, writing and reading exercises and research projects.

"The program uses instruction and assessment to enhance the optimal physical, mental, social and emotional development of students necessary for lifelong health and learning," said 1st Lt. Dannielle Flanigan, Drug Demand Reduction Administrator. "It is designed to be presented over a three-year period, spanning the years of transition from elementary to high school. The multi-year approach is more effective than a 'single-shot' intervention."

The National Guard supports this curriculum by sending instructors to schools around the nation.

"New York currently has 10 full-time Stay on Track instructors, working in the Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Utica/Rome, Capital District, New York City and Long Island areas," Lieutenant Flanigan said. "These instructors are full-time National Guard Counterdrug Soldiers and Airmen. They have taught more than 5,000 students in school year 2009/2010."

"When The National Guard Soldiers and Airmen instruct Stay on Track in uniform, it symbolizes commitment," she continued. "This creates the opportunity for students to make the commitment to be drug-free. The military



Photo by Staff Sgt. Stephen Girolami

Counterdrug personnel in the NYC region support Orangeburg's celebration of National Night Out, a unique crime/drug prevention program providing drug prevention education and alternative activities.

provides unique capabilities and a strong foundation to increase awareness and provide leadership within their own communities. The National Guard Soldiers and Airmen are a perfect fit for the mission as they embody commitment."

Stay on Track was developed by the National Center for Prevention and Research Solutions (NCPRS), a nonprofit organization founded in 1989. The organization conducted a three-year study in 2006 which indicated substantial growth in key areas, according to the NCPRS Web site. The research indicated "that students who completed the program demonstrated improvement in

goal setting, communication skills, decision making skills, perceiving drug use as unacceptable, and have increased their ability to resist negative peer pressure."

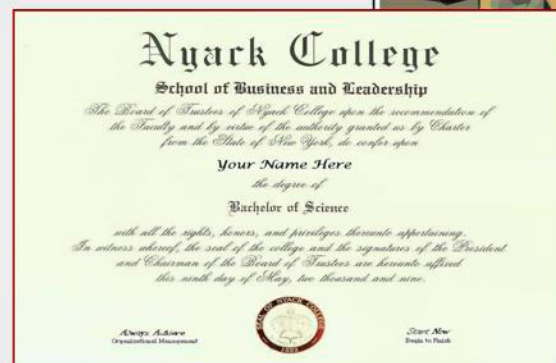
While the National Guard and the program give students the tools they need to stay drug-free, the fight against drugs doesn't stop in the classroom.

"Parents and guardians can help make the SOT program successful by reviewing the information with their child," Lieutenant Flanigan said. "We provide worksheets titled 'Your Turn at the Wheel' at the end of each lesson that we encourage the students to go over with their parents or guardians."





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## Local



Photo by Master Sgt. Christine Wood

## Special Delivery

Members of the 109th Airlift Wing deliver Thanksgiving boxes to Summit Towers in Schenectady in conjunction with Concerned for the Hungry. They picked up more than 60 boxes at Keene School to deliver on Nov. 22.

## Military OneSource

# Sticking to healthy habits

By Alicia Russo  
Military OneSource

Sometimes, making changes isn't easy, but when you find your own motivation and make the change one step at a time, it's more manageable. Military OneSource's Healthy Habits Coaching Programs for servicemembers and families can help you make the positive changes you want to – and stick with them!

Designed by health professionals, the iCan Programs will help you understand your behaviors and help you reach your goals. The personal health coaching is what makes these programs unique. You work one-on-one with your own certified health coach throughout your program. These programs also include a personal homepage with a tracker, interactive tools,

access to a Health Library and much more! All at no-cost!

- iCanChange uses a personalized, flexible, and supportive approach to help you reach your weight and health goals.
- iCanThrive teaches you how to fuel your body with healthy foods, begin a program of enjoyable physical movement, and relax more.
- iCanRelax helps you become aware of stress and how it affects you, and gain skills for handling your reactions to stressful demands and changes.
- iCan Achieve is a 12 month program for teens aged 13-18 that will support their weight management and fitness goals. It focuses on helping teens make behavioral changes that will allow them

to set and achieve their goals.

The program, based on scientifically proven methods includes telephonic health coaching, online tools, a health assessment, and educational information. To start or re-access the Healthy Habits Coaching Program, go to [www.militaryonesource.com](http://www.militaryonesource.com), and then click on the "Health Coaching" icon toward the bottom of the page.

Military OneSource's Life Health Assessment is a complimentary program that supports the Healthy Habits Coaching Programs. This assessment is a global evaluation of your physical health, behavioral health, and motivation to change. Answer a series of questions and get immediate feedback in a detailed personal report that helps you understand how to



make changes. This assessment can be completed repeated times and is another tool for tracking progress reaching your health goals! The areas assessed include:

- Current health
- Nutrition
- Tobacco use
- Vehicle safety
- Physical activity
- Alcohol use
- Stress and depression
- Biometric measures (e.g. weight, height, blood pressure, cholesterol)



# From coma to competition

## Medical officer fights for his life

By Tech. Sgt. Catharine Schmidt  
Public Affairs

He entered the performing arts center on Oct. 23 for the Olympus-Natural Muscle Association competition feeling good. He had trained hard for this moment, and even though he wasn't sure how he would do, he was fired up and ready to go. It had been a long, hard journey getting to this point, but just the fact that he was alive and able to be at this competition was reward enough for him.

Maj. Eric Laughton, the 109th Medical Group senior medical administrator and a New York State Trooper on the civilian side, had been lifting weights for 25 years and entered his first contest in November 2009. In the beginning of 2010, he was in pristine physical shape and had been training for a bodybuilding contest at a weight of 170 pounds with a body fat estimated at 6 percent, but on Feb. 5, 2010,



Courtesy photo

Maj. Eric Laughton was in a coma for 13 days, and the doctors were sure he wouldn't make it. They said his excellent physical condition was what saved his life.

his body started to give out on him. He was having severe abdominal cramping and because he was out at the base for a Drill weekend, he was admitted to a hospital in Schenectady.

"When I entered the hospital, I was in horrific pain," Major Laughton said. "The doctors seemed at a loss to control it." A few days later, his intestines had perforated and he needed emergency surgery. "By this time, I was in intense pain (likely shock) and have no recollection of going into surgery."

During surgery, doctors were able to repair the intestines but the perforation poisoned Major Laughton's body, and all life systems – heart, lungs, liver and kidney – began shutting down. "To complicate matters, I incurred acute respiratory distress syndrome, a syndrome by itself quite deadly. I slipped into a coma and was placed on life support. The doctor announced that I was not doing well, and it was wise to have friends and family in to say their final goodbyes; I was not expected to make it through the night."

"When we were told he probably wouldn't make it through the night, I think my mind went blank," said Sabrina Sterling, Major Laughton's girlfriend, who was also four months pregnant with their son at the time. "It wasn't real; it couldn't be. There was no way this was going to happen. I wasn't going to allow it and there is no way that God would take the greatest man I know away so young. He couldn't do that; Eric had three boys and one on the way who needed him; I needed him. I don't think that I ever really accepted what I was being told, and I held onto the fact that Eric is a fighter and had too much in life to fight for."

Just as Ms. Sterling expected, Major Laughton's body did begin to fight back. He made it through the night and continued to fight over the next few weeks with friends, family and co-workers by his side continuing to pray for a miracle.

"Given that we were in Schenectady, miles away from home (in Buffalo), the Air

National Guard truly became our second family," Ms. Sterling said. "A day did not go by when there wasn't someone from the unit there to sit with us, get us food, offer up a place to stay, or sit with Eric while we took a nap. One of the things that helped the most during this difficult time was having people with Eric when myself and the rest of his family couldn't be. The friendships and laughter were also instrumental in helping deal with all of the stress of the situation. There is a true healing power in laughter and friendship."

"The support was immeasurable," Major Laughton said. "I am blessed to be assigned to the best medical group in the country. It was a doctor from the unit who initially drove me to the hospital. He sounded the bell, and other doctors from the base came. A couple of these doctors work fulltime for the hospital. When the hospital initially tried to discharge me, they immediately stepped in and had the decision reversed. That alone probably saved my life. Once admitted, they ensured that at every moment I had the best care possible. They, along with numerous nurses from the unit who also worked at the hospital fulltime, never left my side; when one left, another came. It was a team effort to keep me alive – and I'm grateful for that."

"They ensured my family was taken care of," he continued. "The commander [Col. Mary Brandt] on one occasion cooked a meal at her house and brought it to the hospital for my family. These acts of kindness continued throughout my stay and were instrumental in my recovery and keeping my family's sanity. Between the Air National Guard and the New York State Police (also there constantly) family, I had continued support and I've come to realize how important that was."

After 13 days, the life support was removed and Major Laughton regained consciousness for the first time since his surgery.

"The doctors stated it was my excellent physical condition that was extremely instrumental in my survival," Major



Courtesy photo

Maj. Eric Laughton, the 109th Medical Group senior medical administrator, with his boys during his recovery. His boys are, from left, Eric, Christian and Daniel. Major Laughton recently competed and won in the Olympus-Natural Muscle Association competition.

Laughton said. "It was made clear to me that 'medicine' did what it could, but the real fight had to come from me, and that if not for my physical condition the outcome would have been different."

"The funny thing is that I thought I was training for a contest at the time of this incident, but I'd soon come to find out I was training for the biggest fight of my life – and that was indeed my life."

But his fight wasn't over; he still had a lot of work to do.

"My muscles had atrophied severely and I had lost 42 pounds [weighing only 128 pounds]," he said. "I had lost the ability to walk or talk. I was, as they stated, 'completely de-conditioned.' The doctors said I was fortunate to be alive, but that the recovery would be grueling, and full healing would likely not happen for at least a year. I thought I had nerve damage because I could not even text. The doctor stated that was because I had no muscle left."

Major Laughton was released on March 4. With Ms. Sterling by his side, and with the help of nurses and a physical therapist, he was about to begin the long road to recovery.

"When I got home, again Sabrina was there for me in every

manner," Major Laughton said. "I could not walk, could barely talk, and couldn't shower or feed myself for a while. She handled all those 'basic' survival issues and never once complained, showed frustration or expressed negativity. Without her, I surely would have needed to be admitted to a physical therapy home."

But competition was out of the question for Major Laughton. Or so the doctors said.

"I had a physical therapist come to the house. He was knowledgeable and a good guy – but I understood more how to heal my body through bodybuilding. So, I took on rehab myself," Major Laughton said. "Sabrina drove me to the gym. The workouts were excruciating; I had lost (more than 40) pounds and still could barely walk. I began with the 5-pound pink—what I affectionately call 'girly'—weights, which I could barely lift. Very slowly to start, I gained strength."

His weight also slowly began to increase. By March 27, a week after he first entered the gym again, he was up to 148 pounds. He returned to work April 4, and his workouts continued.

"There came a time when

See LAUGHTON Page 14





Courtesy photo

Sabrina Sterling was there throughout Maj. Eric Laughton's medical ordeal and helped him on his way to recovery. They plan on marrying in 2011.

### Laughton, from page 13

I told Sabrina I wanted—needed—to compete. I had unfinished business. Despite deep reservations, she supported my decision.”

Ms. Sterling had also competed in the past, and knew first-hand what the training was like. Because of that, she was scared.

“I felt that Eric’s body had just been put through the ultimate test and there he was telling me he needed to do this,” she said. “I asked him to wait to allow his body to heal but also knew that I had to support him with his decision. I knew in my heart he had to do this for him, so I made a promise to myself to be there for him, but we had a mutual agreement that if he started to experience any negative effects he’d stop.”

Major Laughton began to train for the Olympus-Natural Muscle Association competition on Oct. 23 as his goal. By July,

with the support of Ms. Sterling and his trainer, Bert Harrop, Major Laughton was up to 175 pounds, with a competition weight goal of 163.

“It was a balance, especially because it was so close to when I had surgery,” he said. “I had to bring up my weight by eating enough calories and lifting heavy weights (very difficult) to increase muscle mass.

But an important part of the competitive bodybuilding is the diet and added cardio. So, I had to add a lot of weight and then had to subtract a lot of weight while maintaining appropriate muscle mass needed to step on stage. So, the battle is not just in the gym, but in your mind.”

His training continued, and just a few days before the competition, he was confident all of his hard work had paid off.

“I think I’m ready,” he said. “I would have liked more time to build back more muscle mass that was lost during, but I had limited time. ... I’ve worked

hard. Sabrina has cooked all my food, and I feel I am, at a minimum, respectable enough to get on stage. This is only my second contest – but I’m fired up, mostly to just be what I like to call ‘vertical’ and alive.”

He took a deep breath and went out on stage. As he competed he knew he had done all that he could and more to get to this point. But most importantly, he was alive. His hard work paid off. Major Laughton took fifth place in the Men’s Open Middleweight; second place in the Masters Over 40; first place in Novice; and took the Novice overall. Jerry Marsala, the show’s promoter, then presented him with a personally designed Heart Trophy as he told the audience Eric Laughton’s story...



Courtesy photo

Maj. Eric Laughton and Sabrina Sterling with their family, Daniel, Keanu, Christian and Eric. Ms. Sterling was 4 months pregnant with Keanu when Major Laughton was first admitted to the hospital. Keanu was born July 29.



Courtesy photo

Maj. Eric Laughton took home numerous trophies at the Olympus-Natural Muscle Association competition Oct. 23, only eight months after he was first admitted to the hospital.

## 109th Airman named APA Military Player of the Month

By Becky Clover  
American Poolplayers Association

**T**ech. Sgt. Annee Milewski, an aviation structural mechanic here, was named the American Poolplayers Association Military Player of the Month for August. Sergeant Milewski has been an APA member since 2002, starting out with 8-Ball and then adding 9-Ball in 2005.

While there are no pool tables at the base here, there is in both Greenland and Antarctica, where she has deployed to numerous times. During deployments, she spends much of her off-duty time practicing. She started playing pool when her brother taught her the basics at the age of 7. But, she really began playing seriously while stationed in Hawaii.

She’s made many friends, from all walks of life, and continues to keep in touch with several of them. In Greenland, pool’s allowed her to get to know a lot more members from the base who work in

different sections.

“Pool helps me to relax when I’m deployed. We put in very long days in Antarctica, with 12-hour shifts, in often extreme conditions, with an additional hour or more of travel (each way) between the ice runway and McMurdo Station,” Sergeant Milewski said. “Shooting pool helps me to wind down at the end of the day, plus it’s given me the opportunity to meet many of the civilians that work down there, who also play pool.”

Sergeant Milewski first got involved with the APA when some friends who were playing in the League asked her to join their team. Her 8-Ball Open team is headed to the National Team Championships this year for the third year in a row.

“I love the camaraderie!” she said. “Even though the competition is pretty steep in my current League, we all still manage to have a lot of fun, with the teams conversing and joking back and forth. It’s kind of like a second family, and although everyone would LIKE to win, I’ve yet to meet any poor losers.”

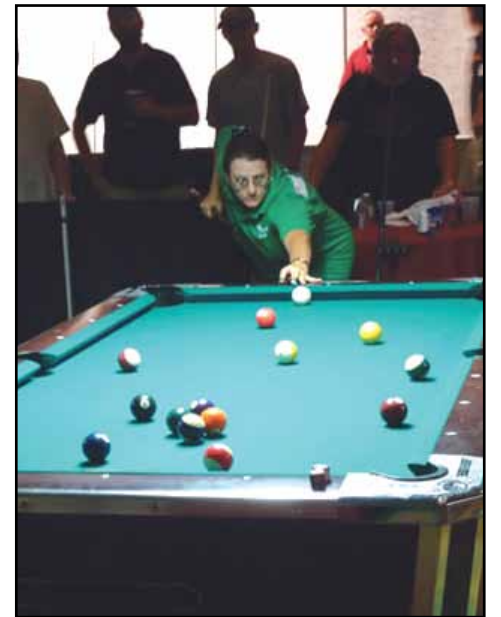


Photo courtesy of APA

Tech. Sgt. Annee Milewski was named APAMilitary Player of the Month for August. She’s been an APA member since 2002. Sergeant Milewski is an aviation structural mechanic with the 109th Airlift Wing.

## 109th kids benefit from Operation Purple camp

By Tech. Sgt. Catharine Schmidt  
Public Affairs

**E**ach summer, the National Military Family Association runs Operation Purple camp – a free weeklong camp offered to military children nationwide. This past summer, families of the 109th Airlift Wing took part in the program which was held at Aldersgate Camp and Retreat Center in the Adirondacks.

According to its Web site, “The goal of the Operation Purple camp program is to give military children tools to help deal with the stresses that result from a parent’s deployment, through a memorable camp experience in a ‘purple’ environment. Operation Purple camps are open to military children of all ranks and Services: active and reserve components—and give priority to children whose parents are currently within a 15 month deployment ‘window’

(specific dates announced each year). At Operation Purple camps, military children experience an exciting week of outdoor fun and adventure.”

Since 2004, the program has been helping tens of thousands of children cope with the stress of having a parent deployed. There are currently 68 camps across America, for children ages 7-17.

Lt. Col. Mike Steindl, 139th Airlift Squadron commander, and his wife, Wendy, have sent their children, Riley, Jenny and Megan, to Operation Purple camp for the last three years.

“While at camp, the children follow a ‘military-like’ schedule with daily flag ceremonies held at breakfast and dinner, cadence singing and dining hall duties,” Mrs. Steindl said. “On the first evening, an icebreaker activity had them place a photo of their deployed family member on the Wall of Honor with a brief written explanation



of what makes them special and activities they enjoy doing together when they return from deployments. Campers experience a special Military Appreciation Day when Black Hawk helicopters arrive with various military personnel. They get to interact directly with them and experience similar scenarios that their deployed family member might engage in by donning gas masks and other military gear. They also have fun traversing a military style obstacle course.”

The overnight camp groups children by age in different cabins. Each cabin of about eight to 12 is staffed with at least two experienced camp counselors.

“Cabin activities center on how to deal with

See CAMP Page 18





## Honor Guard looking for sharp, motivated Airmen

By Tech. Sgt. Allen Moon  
Base Honor Guard NCOIC

The 109th Base Honor Guard is looking for young, sharp and motivated Airmen and NCOs. The wing is seeing a “boom” of new faces, and the Honor Guard has taken notice. We are constantly looking for new troops to add to the fold and, at times, openly reach out to the base populous to spark interest. Many new recruits are overwhelmed with orientation, training and getting to know their units, that they don’t even realize the 109th has a Base Honor Guard! We are putting out the call to join an elite group of individuals that make up the top Honor Guard in our Area of Responsibility (AOR).


The 109th Base Honor Guard (BHG) actually works for the 66th Services Flight at Hanscom Air Force Base, Mass. Active-duty BHGs utilize Air National Guard and Reserve units to extend their reach in providing Military Funeral Honors to U.S. Air Force, Army Air Corps and Army Air Forces veterans. Simply put, it’s more cost efficient to utilize our team here than to have a team drive out from Boston to provide honors in Albany. The 66th SVF provides training, guidance and coordination between the Guard and Resrve units and the U.S. Air Force Honor Guard located at Bolling AFB in Washington. The U.S. Air Force Honor

Guard has total control over all Honor Guard teams in the Air Force, Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve.

The 109th BHG currently has four full-time members assigned and about 30 volunteer members. That may sound like a lot of volunteers, but with our many missions (Operation Deep Freeze, Greenland and contingency deployments) our volunteers are always on the move. The more team members we have, the more knowledge and experience we can utilize. The 109th BHG performs between 200 and 300 Military Funeral Honors (MFH) each year, which is our main mission. We can also be requested for community events and ceremonies. Our AOR has a huge military population, of both veterans and retirees, all of which are eligible for MFH upon request. As long as there are veterans to honor and remember, there will always be a need for BHG teams like ours!

If you have a desire to honor those who came before you and serve as an example for those just starting their journey, we want to talk to you! You will be hard-pressed to find a more rewarding endeavor than performing Military Funeral Honors for our nation’s veterans. If you are interested in being a part of our elite and dedicated team, please contact Tech. Sgt. Allen Moon at 344-2586 or Chief Master Sgt. Denny Richardson at 344-2574 for more information.





### Are you pregnant?

If pregnant, you must notify Flight Medicine (344-2408) and Public Health (344-2503) to be profiled at confirmation of pregnancy. Once you have delivered the baby (or pregnancy has been terminated) you must report back to Flight Medicine and Public Health.

## Deadline Notice

Articles for the next issue of *the Skibird* are due by Jan. 14.

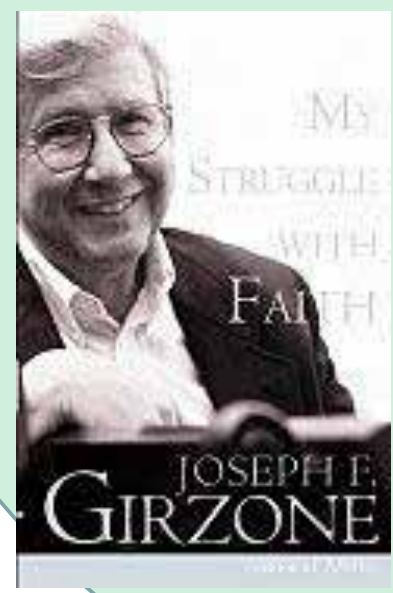


# christmas

## ECUMENICAL SERVICE

Sunday December 5th at 7:45am (@the Base Dining Hall)

### Featuring Best-Selling Author Father Robert Girzone!




Father Joseph Girzone is an international author and speaker. His best known works are *Joshua* and its sequels, which have been translated for millions of readers worldwide. He has also written exceptional works on grief and faith. To his credit, he has authored over 10 best-selling books. Through his books and speaking engagements, Father Joseph Francis Girzone strives to deliver messages of hope and peace to anybody seeking spiritual nourishment.

**COME JOIN YOUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS TO ENJOY AND SUPPORT THIS 109<sup>TH</sup> CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION!**

### 109<sup>th</sup> Chaplain Services

DSN: 344-2355 / Located in Bld. 1, next to JAG





## Family Programs

### Yellow Ribbon 'one-stop shop' for Airmen, families

By Tech. Sgt. Catharine Schmidt

Airman & Family Readiness Programs Assistant

What Tricare benefits am I entitled to? What exactly is Military OneSource? Who can my family turn to if they need assistance while I'm gone? Can I benefit from Veterans Administration programs? How will things go back to "normal" when I return?

These are all questions deploying members may be asking themselves, and there is a lot of information out there for them and their families. That's exactly why the Department of Defense established the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program.

According to the Yellow Ribbon Web site, the program's mission is to: "Provide National Guard and Reserve members and their families with information, services, referrals, and proactive outreach opportunities

throughout the deployment cycle."

The 109th Airman and Family Readiness Programs Office accomplishes this through a one-day event off base, which usually includes a nice lunch. Previous events have been held at the Glen Sanders Mansion and the Edison Club.

Yellow Ribbon events are mandatory for 109th Airlift Wing members who are deploying in support of a contingency operations for 90 or more days. Members are required to attend an event before they deploy as well as when they return. The Airman and Family Readiness Programs Office keeps track of Wing members deploying, lets the members and supervisors know details of the event, and sends out invitations to family members. While events aren't mandatory for family members,

it's a great opportunity for them to obtain information on all the resources available to them while their loved ones are deployed as well as network with other families who are going through a deployment.

Some of the service providers who are available at the events include representatives from Tricare, the Legal Office, the Chaplain's Office, Military One Source, the VA, Personal Financial Management, the American Red Cross and many others. The event serves as a "one-stop shop" of resources for the servicemembers and their families.

Many servicemembers deploy numerous times, and that's no exception for 109th AW members. It's still important that members attend Yellow Ribbon events even if they have previously been to them.

"Regardless of the number of deployments you may have experienced or the information

you've already received, the Yellow Ribbon Program offers the newest and most current information to participants, such as current eligibility for certain benefits or available resources," according to the Web site. "Yellow Ribbon Events give many servicemembers the opportunity to see fellow unit members, or talk to professionals about deployment-related topics such as employment, finances, and health care."

For more information on the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program, visit [www.yellowribbon.mil](http://www.yellowribbon.mil). You can also contact the 109th Airman and Family Readiness Programs Office at 344-2357 or by e-mail at [109AW.FAMILYSUPP@ang.af.mil](mailto:109AW.FAMILYSUPP@ang.af.mil). The 109th Family Programs Office is also on the Web at [www.109aw.ang.af.mil/resources/familyreadiness](http://www.109aw.ang.af.mil/resources/familyreadiness) and has a "109th Airlift Wing Family Programs" Facebook page at [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com).

Camp, from page 15

the various emotions experienced while their family member is deployed. As they sit around the campfire, they find out they are not alone and that the wide range of emotions is 'normal' and experienced by many," Mrs. Steindl said. "As a group, cabin members perform skits and design artwork for banners and guidons. The counselors lead them in a multitude of team building activities that also help foster self-confidence and self-awareness. This year our son's age allowed him to participate in a challenging High Ropes course and a fun-filled whitewater rafting trip designed especially for campers age 13-17."

Along with the Steindls, Tech. Sgt. Jim Touchette and his wife, Laurie, sent their daughters to Operation Purple camp this year.

"The girls were introduced to other boys and girls who have a parent or guardian

who is active duty and spends time on deployment," Mrs. Touchette said. "They were able to relate to the struggles and hardships military children/families go through."

For Emma and Katie Touchette, it was their first time away from home without a relative, but they still seemed to have a great time. "Emma especially enjoyed the archery, and Katie enjoyed dressing in BDUs and the gas mask 'just like Daddy,'" Mrs. Touchette said.

Sergeant Touchette deployed last year in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and has also deployed numerous times to Greenland and Antarctica since 2000. "My daughters have learned to deal with 'normal' deployments pretty well," Mrs. Touchette said. "However, being 10 and 11, they are now well aware of the dangers involved in Jim's Afghanistan deployment. They were scared this time around – afraid he would

be hurt."

With deployments happening so frequently in all of the services, these types of feelings are exactly what help the children relate to other campers.

"I would recommend this program to everyone," Mrs. Touchette said. "These types of summer camps for military families are located throughout the Northeast. We plan on applying again next year – the girls don't want to miss it!"

"At the end of camp, our children rave about their Operation Purple camp experience," Mrs. Steindl said. "They meet children from other military services, exchange addresses and forge unique friendships based on their similar situations. They keep in touch throughout the year and look forward to seeing one another the following summer. Both my husband and I highly recommend this opportunity for other military families."

## Local

### Wing members, family, friends enjoy Fall Fest

Master Sgt. Diane Power with her granddaughter Caylie Johndrow, 7. About 200 Airmen, friends and family attended Fall Fest on Oct. 23. Activities included pumpkin painting, a haunted hayride and Haunted Herc.



Photos by Al Roland



Maj. Jeff Hedges with his boys, Jacob and Isaac, and wife, Lisa. About 200 Airmen, friends and family attended Fall Fest on Oct. 23. Activities included a Chili Cookoff, Pie Baking Contest and costume parade.



Lucas Schmidt, 3, paints a pumpkin at Fall Fest on Oct. 23. Along with pumpkin painting, other activities included a costume parade, Haunted Herc and haunted hayride.



Christina Archambeault and Barb Secor with (from left) Connor, 4, Christopher, 5, and Joseph, 9. About 200 Airmen, friends and family attended Fall Fest on Oct. 23 that was organized by the Volunteer Wing Family Readiness and Support Group. Activities included a Chili Cookoff, Pie Baking Contest and costume parade.



Makayla Reynolds, 6, and Angela Peceri, 8. About 200 Airmen, friends and family attended Fall Fest on Oct. 23 that was organized by the Volunteer Wing Family Readiness and Support Group.

## 109th AW Annual Children's Holiday Party

Dec. 18th, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.  
Special Guest: Santa Claus

RSVP to [109AW.FAMILYSUPP@ang.af.mil](mailto:109AW.FAMILYSUPP@ang.af.mil)



Check the 109th Airlift Wing Family Programs Facebook page for more information as it becomes available.



# Council offers fun, games and more

By David Apkarian  
TransTech Systems President

Recently the Schenectady Military Affairs Council (SMAC), a program of The Chamber of Schenectady County, undertook several major projects with Stratton Air National Guard Base personnel. SMAC community volunteers assisted with the Family Day event on Aug. 15 and a recent Civic Leader Tour to Charleston, S.C.

Family Day was a major undertaking for all involved, and the turnout was greater than expected. SMAC members assisted with the bouncy-bounce operation, applied washable tattoos, scooped ice cream (that proved to be tough as nails), handed out drinks, made popcorn and cooked chicken wings all day! At any given time, there were 15 to 20 SMAC volunteers assisting in the various operations. The feedback from these volunteers was tremendous, and all truly enjoyed the experience of giving back to support our local troops and their families.

SMAC would like to thank

all the community volunteers who supported this event for a job well done! Many corporate sponsors also supported Family Day. By involving local businesses, we were not only able to get funding for the event but also hope to involve the businesses and their employees in supporting the 109th Airlift Wing. Thanks to the following companies for their continued support of SMAC activities, and specifically for Family Day:

- BBL Campus Development
- Curtis Lumber
- Marshall & Sterling Insurance
- Miranda Real Estate Group
- Solid Surface Craftsman
- TransTech Systems, Inc.

SMAC is not all about fun and games, and the recent Civic Leaders Trip to Charleston, S.C., on Oct. 7-9 drove home a very important message. Eighteen civic leaders from around the Capital District had the opportunity to travel aboard an LC-130 Hercules with the 139th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron to learn first-hand about the mission and capabilities of the 109th Airlift Wing. The trip was a smashing success, and

the attendees were extremely impressed with Stratton ANGB as well as the hospitality offered by Joint Base Charleston. One recurring statement heard throughout the trip was, "I never realized what these folks do." This is the No. 1 priority in SMAC's mission: To get the word out locally about what a great asset we have in Schenectady County. SMAC would like to thank all the crew members for displaying their true professionalism and allowing our civic leaders to get a peek at what you do to serve our country.

On Oct. 23, SMAC volunteers cooked hamburgers, hot dogs and chicken wings at the 109th Fall Festival, and on Nov. 9 we welcomed many Wing members who once again joined us for the 2nd Annual "To Honor and Serve" Veterans' Day Breakfast in the Dining Hall. It was a sell-out crowd with more than 250 military and community members in attendance, including students from Yates Elementary School, who provided entertainment and artistic placemats for the event.

**Have You Seen This Man on Base?**

David Apkarian joined SMAC in 2007 after becoming "hooked on the 109th" during a Civic Leader trip to Washington, D.C. His brother, Bruce Apkarian, is an alumnus of the 109th. A self-proclaimed airplane fanatic, David was instrumental in the planning and execution of the Wing's 60th Anniversary Party in October 2008. He has since assumed the role of chief fundraiser and chicken wing chef for SMAC events! David is also spearheading plans for "Wings Over Tech Valley," a local air show proposed for 2012. He is president of TransTech Systems, Inc., a growth company dedicated to revolutionizing the transportation and other industries by providing advanced technological solutions through innovative products and services. Should you run into David on base sometime, be sure to stop him and say hello!



David Apkarian  
SMAC Chairman



Courtesy photo

SMAC Volunteers Ron Berube, Deb Perez, Robin Granger and David Apkarian serve chicken wings at Family Day 2010.



Photo by Master Sgt. Willie Gizara

Col. Timothy LaBarge, 109th Airlift Wing commander, speaks at the 2nd Annual "To Honor and Serve" Veterans' Day Breakfast hosted by SMAC. More than 250 military and community members attended the breakfast.

## FINANCE TIPS

[109AW.finance@ang.af.mil](mailto:109AW.finance@ang.af.mil)

### MILITARY PAY

How to get paid: when you complete your tour of duty, submit a certified (signed by your supervisor) copy of your order to the Mil Pay Inbox in the Finance office. You must submit a SEPARATE order to the Travel Pay Inbox with your local mileage claim or travel voucher.

Access your LES from the myPay website at <https://mypay.dfas.mil/mypay.aspx>

IMPORTANT! Save all LES's to a file or keep a hard copy for your records

### TRAVEL PAY

File a voucher within 5 days of return from a TDY. Submit a copy of your signed voucher along with a copy of your orders (AROWS order and CED order, if applicable: we need both) along with the following receipts, as a minimum:

- Airline receipt showing fare
- Lodging/ billeting/ hotel receipts
- Rental car receipt (Not the contract – the final receipt)
- Expenses over \$75

Local order – mileage only: fill out bottom portion of order and sign it

Sample reimbursable expenses:

- Taxi or POV mileage to/ from airport
- Baggage handling fees (only at the airport)
- ATM fees (Govt card only)
- International transaction fees (Govt card only)

### GOVERNMENT TRAVEL CARD

DO NOT use it unless you are on TDY orders. Use is NOT authorized in the local area, on inactive duty, or for personal use. Misuse can subject you to discipline under the UCMJ. Mandatory use for airline tickets (except ODF), lodging and rental car.

ATM cash advance authorized no earlier than 3 days prior to TDY

Payment is due on the 16<sup>th</sup> of each month – pay it online at <https://home.cards.citidirect.com/CommercialCard/Cards.html>

Or email Finance at [109AW.finance@ang.af.mil](mailto:109AW.finance@ang.af.mil) (if TDY over 30 days) and request an accrual payment



# Christmas party, officer elections coming up

By Retired Lt. Col. Tom Noel  
Alumni Representative

The 109th Airlift Wing Alumni Association's Annual Summer Picnic was held Aug. 21 at the pavilion here. About 100 people attended and were able to get together with many of their friends. Many thanks to all the volunteers who cooked and made this get-together a wonderful summer picnic for the 109th AW.

Upcoming Events:  
The Annual Alumni Christmas Party will be held Dec. 15 at the Turf Tavern in Scotia at 5 p.m. Dinner will be served at 6 p.m. Sign-up forms will be out soon -- hope to see many of you there!

Election of Officers for the 109th Airlift Wing Alumni Association will take place in January.

Aircrews from the 109th Airlift Wing headed to the Antarctic and South Pole in October. The 109th Airlift Wing, supporting the National Science Foundation (NSF) Operation Deep Freeze (ODF), began its 22nd season, 1988 being its first season.

The 109th AW will be featured in an upcoming documentary called "Arctic Air" and is due out Nov. 8. This was filmed last year by (PBS) with the 109th AW in Greenland. The trailer is up and running on WCNY's You Tube Channel, WCNY is a New York TV station. Check it out

and enjoy.  
The 109th Airlift Wing held its Annual Family Day on Aug. 15 here. The event included food and drinks, aircraft static displays, car and motorcycle show, a live band, State Police, DARE and a bouncy bounce. It was a great time with a lot of participation.

The 109th Airlift Wing Alumni Association members would like to welcome home many members of the 109th AW who spent a lot of time deployed to Afghanistan this year; thank you for your services for our country.

Retired Master Sgt. Von E. Ahouse is a Health Benefits Specialist at US Family Health Plan at Martins Point, 28 Corporate Drive, Suite 104 Clifton Park, NY 12065, (518) 588-4441. He presented an outstanding speech about Tricare Health Insurance and Tricare for Life Military Health Insurance on June 16 at the monthly alumni meeting. Many informative handouts were given to the people attending his excellent presentation.

The 109th AW Alumni Association members would like to send their condolences to the families of the following members of the 109th Airlift Wing who have died within the past few months:

Louis Edward Salerno, 59, of Rotterdam passed away suddenly on Aug. 15. Louis served our country in the Air National Guard with 36 years of service retiring as a chief

master sergeant.  
Irene M. Mitchell, 94, formerly of Glenville, N.Y., passed away Aug. 20, at the Baptist Nursing and Rehabilitation Center. She worked at the 109th AW Stratton Air National Guard where she was a purchasing clerk for 15 years.

Joe Dybas passed away Sept. 26 in Amsterdam, N.Y. He was the "Dock Chief" and also was the B-26 (Douglas) Crew Chief until 1951 when the U.S. Air Force took him back from the Air National Guard and sent him to South Korea.

Bruce Gardinier, age 61, of Gloversville, N.Y., passed away on Oct. 11 at Mountain Valley Hospice in Gloversville. Bruce served his country proudly during the Vietnam War in the U.S. Air Force. Following his four years of active duty in the U.S. Air Force, Bruce served in the New York Air National Guard for more than 20 years where he was stationed at the 109th AW.

There have been a few individuals who have retired in the past few months. Kristine Rafferty retired and is now our newest member of the 109th AW Alumni Association. If you know any more of them, please invite them to our meeting the third Wednesday of each month starting at 7:30 p.m. at the All Ranks Club, Stratton ANG Base. Their first year of membership of the Alumni Association is free if joining in the first year of their retirement. We always look forward to seeing new faces and new members at our monthly meetings.

The Quarterly Skibird Magazine is also available on the 109th AW's Web site at [www.109aw.ang.af.mil](http://www.109aw.ang.af.mil). If for some reason you don't receive the Skibird Magazine in the mail, you can read it online.

Until the next quarterly issue of this Skibird Magazine publication, hope you all stay Happy, Healthy, Safe, Prosperous and "Think Winter" for a Merry Noel Christmas.



Courtesy photo

The Alumni Association held its Annual Summer Picnic on the base Aug. 21. About 100 people attended the event.

## Senior Airman Michael Crouse 139th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron 109th Base Honor Guard

Senior Airman Michael Crouse became interested in joining the Air National Guard after hearing about his brother-in-law's experience with the 109th Airlift Wing.

"He was always traveling overseas and around the country," Airman Crouse said. "He wore his uniform proudly. I have always wanted to serve my country in a capacity such as this."

Airman Crouse enlisted at 29 years old. Along with being assigned to the 139th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron, he is also a full-time member of the 109th Base Honor Guard.

On his off-duty time, Airman Crouse bartends a few nights a week at an Italian restaurant, and he also plays in a softball league during the summer. He spends all of his free time with his family -- his wife, Caron, and daughter, Lila.

Airman Crouse said working with the Base Honor Guard has been his most satisfying experience with the Air National Guard so far.

"It is extremely rewarding, and I get such a feeling of pride when paying respect to the men and women who helped protect this country," he said. "In my opinion, it is one of the best jobs on the base and throughout the military. I believe everyone should have a chance to experience it."

Airman Crouse said he's scheduled for a mission with the AES where they will be flying home Airmen who have been deployed.

"I expect that this next mission will equally compare to the Honor Guard experience, due to the fact that I'll be 'escorting' them home after their ordeal. Being there for the troops on the final trip home, I feel, is very important."



U.S. Air Force photo

## Promotions & Awards

July 17 through Oct. 25

### Officer Promotions

Lieutenant Colonel  
Andy Fitorre -- AS  
Alvinzo Wilson -- AS

Major  
Rebecca Schultz -- LRS

### Enlisted Promotions

#### Technical Sergeant

Gregory M. Aldi -- AMXS  
Matthew J. Begin -- AMXS  
David L. Burt -- AES  
Matthew L. Christman -- AS  
Christopher Kasuba -- MXS  
Dean M. Lansley -- MSF  
Daniel J. Magdziuk -- MXS  
Aaron N. Moore -- CES  
Brett Pacanowski -- AW  
Jason S. Robelotto -- AES  
Nicole A. Roberson -- MOF  
Brian T. Rulison -- AMXS  
Luke B. Ryder -- CES  
Krystle R. Smith -- MDS  
Zugiel Y. Soto -- AW

#### Staff Sergeant

Alicia L. Albert -- AES  
Eric C. Canestraro -- AS

Joseph A. Dugan -- MXS  
Joseph M. Shanahan -- STUF  
Christopher L. Smith -- MXS

#### Senior Airman

Brian Bednar -- MSG  
Jennifer L. Collins -- MSF  
Emma K. Caldwell -- MXS  
Justin D. Carkner -- LRS  
Ryan T. Fortune -- AES  
Sherilyn M. Martin -- MSF  
Christopher M. Meyer -- CES  
Trevor N. Britt -- AS  
Nathan P. Jordan -- AS  
Brian H. Reith -- OSF  
Jordan Kochan -- MSF  
Kyle J. Parker -- SFS  
Robert S. Sardinia -- SFS  
Jacqueline A. Reed -- AS

#### Airman 1st Class

Matthew J. Wasileski -- STUF

### Awards

#### Meritorious Service Medal

CMSgt Debra Morris -- FSS  
SMSgt Penny Sheedy -- FSS

#### Air Force Commendation Medal

MSgt Nicole DellaRocco -- LRS

#### Air Force Achievement Medal

TSgt Allen Moon -- SFS

#### Air Medal

Lt Col Paul A. Breton -- AS  
Lt Col Joseph Hathaway -- AS  
Lt Col Joseph P. Zotto -- AS  
Maj William L. Carraher -- AS  
Maj Carlyle L. Norman -- AS  
Maj Stephen E. Yandik -- AS  
Capt Joshua P. Hicks -- AS  
Capt Steven D. Slosek -- AS  
Capt Daniel W. Urband -- AS  
Capt Eric D. Wood -- AS  
Capt David L. Zielinski -- AS  
1st Lt Ryan T. Giaconia -- AS  
SMSgt Brian R. Alix -- AS  
SMSgt Kevin Gifford -- AS  
MSgt David M. Vesper -- AS



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Photo illustration by Staff Sgt. Brett Bouchard

### ***Mission statement***

*Provide the most professional theatre combat forces, ready to rapidly deploy statewide, worldwide and pole to pole.*

### ***Vision statement***

*A united military organization of empowered individuals building on our proud tradition of serving country, state and community; leaning forward, ready to meet combat and peacetime challenges throughout the world.*